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ABSTRACT

According to a survey of social studies teachers in small, rural, midwest high schools: (1) social studies curriculum needs of rural students do not differ from those of urban students; (2) cultural aspects of rural and urban societies should be passed on to students by the formal education process; and (3) they incorporated rural-oriented aspects into their curriculum. The statistical treatment revealed that the beliefs of the instructors with rural backgrounds were generally similar to the beliefs of instructors with urban backgrounds. This report includes several tables of statistical data. (Authors/DB)

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Social Studies Needs Assessment: Rural vs. Urban

ED318679

By

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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According to social studies teachers in small Midwest high schools, a) social studies curriculum needs of rural students do not differ from those of urban students, b) cultural aspects of rural and urban societies should be passed on to students by the formal educational process, and c) they incorporated rural-oriented aspects into their curriculum. The statistical treatment revealed that the beliefs of the instructors with rural backgrounds were generally similar to the instructors with urban backgrounds.

Social Studies Needs Assessment: Rural vs. Urban

Introduction

Do rural students need a different social studies curriculum than urban students?

That question provided the motivation for this research study, while the primary purpose was to investigate if there was a perceived need for a different social studies curriculum for rural versus urban students. Specific objectives of this exploration were:

1. To investigate if the social studies curriculum needs of students in rural areas are different from those of urban students as perceived by rural high school social studies teachers.
2. To investigate if particular cultural aspects of rural and urban societies were and should be passed on to students by their families instead of by the formal educational process as perceived by rural high school social studies teachers.
3. To investigate if rural social studies instructors incorporated special rural-oriented aspects into their curriculum.
4. To investigate if there were significant differences between the beliefs of instructors with rural backgrounds and those with urban backgrounds.

Related Research

Objective #1:

Do rural high school social studies teachers feel that social studies curriculum needs of rural students differ from those of urban students? This question was the essence of objective #1 of this study.

Limited available research would indicate a "yes" response to this question. Marshall (1984) concluded that "development of curriculum materials for small rural settings must assume that small is unique, that more resources to buy more materials is not the only answer, and that students should receive quality materials designed for them and delivered in ways appropriate to the environment." Furthermore he believed that small schools differ from large schools not only in size, but also in environment and community factors.

Barker (1985) did not comment directly upon differing curriculum needs among rural and urban students but he did find in his research that of 105 different course offerings, 36 percent were provided at significantly higher frequencies in large high schools whereas only 2 percent were offered at significantly higher frequencies in small schools. Significant differences were noted in all foreign language and advanced placement courses surveyed and in almost one-half of art/business/mathematics/social studies courses.

Tillman (1983) felt isolation, sparsity, smallness, and

differentness hamper pursuit of quality education. Among other factors, he concluded that a necessary basic condition for quality rural education is "core curricula reflecting rural values/culture."

Objective #2:

Do rural high school social studies teachers feel cultural aspects of rural and urban societies were and should be passed on to students by their families instead of by the formal education process?

Research precisely related to this either or question does not seem to exist although Elliott (1987), Marshall (1984), and Tillman (1983) mentioned that parents (community) need to be involved in passing along cultural aspects of societies.

Elliott (1987) stated that "curricula must be expanded to prepare students either to remain in their rural communities as contributing citizens, or to leave with confidence and skills." She did indicate that curricula development and transmission must be a "collaborative" effort including the parents and community.

Objective #3:

Do rural social studies teachers incorporate special rural-oriented aspects into their curriculum?

According to available reported research the answer to this question is "no." Barker (1986) believed the answer is "no" because "a literature review suggests that teacher training programs are unresponsive to needs of prospective rural teachers

and that research interest in rural education is limited."

Current literature indicates that the process and the outcome of social studies education in rural communities is little different from that in the rest of the country according to Easton (1985). He continued "curriculum materials deemed relevant to the lives of students are scarce in rural classrooms, and few teachers take advantages of community resources or develop their own material."

Easton (1984) reported that his analysis of studies indicates textbooks and teaching methods in rural social studies programs, like those in non rural programs, stress information rather than critical thinking and inquiry, are not relevant, and exhibit little teacher resourcefulness.

Huber (1984 & 1986) found that educators felt that 18 social issues had some importance in rural social studies curricula but most of these same issues were not included in curriculum to the extent that they felt necessary.

Objective #4:

No reported research was found to address the question, "Do rural social studies teachers with rural backgrounds have different beliefs than rural social studies teachers with urban backgrounds?"

Method

Procedures

A six page questionnaire was designed to assess if high school social studies teachers believe students attending school in rural

areas need a different social studies curriculum than students enrolled in urban educational school systems. The items were Likert scaled. Seven of the eighteen items were reverse-scored to minimize an acquiescence response set.

The questionnaire, along with a cover letter, was mailed to each principal of public three and four-year North Central Association accredited senior high schools in the four states of Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming with a student enrollment of up to 250. The investigation was conducted in the spring of 1988.

In the cover letter, each principal was asked to forward the questionnaire to one of his/her social studies teachers who was teaching at least one section of a 12th grade social studies class. A total of 111 questionnaires were mailed to 52 schools in Nebraska, 13 in North Dakota, 35 in South Dakota, and 11 in Wyoming. Usable returns numbered 93, which was an 83.3% return rate.

Subjects

Only three of the 93 respondents were female. Because the females were such a very small portion of the sample, the investigators chose to control for gender by using only the 90 male instructors in the further analyses.

All 90 of the subjects were Caucasian and over 75% considered themselves to have come from a rural background. Over half of the respondents had never resided in more than one state for a period

longer than one year. Seventy-six percent of the teachers had visited a city with a population greater than one million. A large majority (91.1%) of the respondents indicated that they planned to continue teaching in a rural area.

History, social science composite, and government were the most commonly held undergraduate majors for the respondents. Forty-five of the subjects possessed graduate degrees.

Limitations

One limitation of this study was the lack of standardized instrumentation. Additionally, the sampling technique (mailed questionnaire) was volunteer, although the return percentage was relatively high. Because the data were used from only male instructors in small, rural, Upper Midwest senior high schools, the results should not be generalized beyond those characteristics.

Results

The responses were analyzed using descriptive means and independent samples T-tests. The mean overall response for each item is presented in both narrative and tabular form. The T-tests follow these descriptive means.

As seen in Table 1, the subjects did not agree that "It is more important for rural students than urban students to study the historical developments of the agriculturally based cultures." The mean response for this item was 2.8, which fell between disagree, which had a scoring value of 2, and mildly disagree, which had a scoring value of 3. The respondents disagreed similarly with "Life

in modern societies is so complex and the need for knowledge and skills is so great that each unique society within our country must have a unique social studies curriculum to meet its own special needs."

Insert Table 1 about here

A mean response of 2.7 was obtained for "Students who live in rural areas should spend more time studying about such things as life, customs, advantages, and disadvantages of living in rural areas." The mean responses fell exactly between mildly disagree and mildly agree (3.5) for "Textbook publishers and authors need to create and distribute social studies texts which have been produced to meet the needs of unique social-economic and geographic populations." The subjects mildly disagreed with a need for special reading materials for rural youth when they gave a mean response of 3.2 for "Special social studies reading materials designed to emphasize the rural culture is necessary because of the vocabulary which is peculiar to the rural environment."

The respondents mildly disagreed with "The relative importance of environmental knowledge for the rural population would indicate a need for a specially designed rural social studies curriculum." They slightly deviated from this position when they mildly agreed to "The world of work in rural American is different enough from urban America that special information must be part of the social

studies curriculum to compensate for this difference."

Reverse-scored items which assessed similar content areas to those mentioned in the foregoing were created to balance a possible acquiescence - opposition response set. These items are shown in Table 2. As the respondents generally "mildly disagreed" to the above items, here they generally "mildly agreed."

They mildly agreed with the item "A student residing in a rural community has very similar educational needs to a student residing in an urban area." The instructors responded similarly to "It is sufficient for our children to learn the common components that constitute the social and cultural legacy of this nation." They presented a related perspective with a mean response of 2.8 (mildly agree) for "All students should study the same social studies materials and topics regardless of whether they live in a city or in a rural areas."

Insert Table 2 about here

All the responses to these items suggest that rural and urban social studies students do not have unique needs. This being the case, the social studies teachers probably do not need special training to teach in rural or urban areas. The respondents indicated an agreement with this idea when they mildly disagreed with this item: "Teachers who plan to teach social studies in rural schools should be required to take courses to learn more

about rural people" (See Table 3).

Although there is no desire for special social studies curriculums, the teachers indicated an approval for and a history of using materials which address this special urban-rural dichotomy. The teachers mildly agreed with the statement "If social studies materials--books, films, filmstrips, pictures, pamphlets--emphasizing the characteristics of rural life were available I would recommend their use in my school system" (see Table 3). The instructors also suggested that they often have their "students read about life and customs of rural people." Through mild agreement with the following item, the teachers further addressed the rural aspects of a social studies curriculum: "Textbooks, films, pictures and media we use in our social studies classes include as many items about rural areas as cities."

Insert Table 3 about here

By mildly disagreeing with the first item in Table 4, they again suggested an incorporation of rural aspects into current practice: "Most of the leaders we study about in our social studies classes grew up in and/or live in cities." Perhaps it is this rural-urban balance which motivated the instructors to mildly disagree with, "Students do not readily identify with topics and

materials which relate specifically to city or urban areas."

Two statements were included in the questionnaire to assess if particular cultural aspects of rural and urban societies should be passed on to students by their families or the formal education process. As shown in Table 4, the instructors mildly disagreed with the following two items: "The particular differences within the urban and rural cultures can be more efficiently taught to its children through the family than incorporated in the formal educational process." and "Rural and urban youth internalize their particular culture's norms, values, expectations, and attitudes without having to be taught such material in the social studies classroom."

Insert Table 4 about here

In addition to evaluating teacher perspectives about social studies curriculums for rural students, the study explored if there were significant differences between the beliefs of instructors with rural backgrounds and those with urban backgrounds. Through the use of independent-samples T-tests, each of the previously mentioned items were assessed for divergent means between the rural background and urban-background instructors. None of the analyses violated the assumptions of homogeneity of variance.

The T-test results have been presented in the four tables. Only the first item in Table 1 had statistically significant

results. Those instructors with a rural background (m=2.5, sd=1.2) more strongly disagreed with the item than did their urban-background colleagues (m=3.4, sd=1.2).

Conclusions

By surveying the feelings of rural social studies teachers in small schools in four states of the Upper Midwest, an assessment was made of the perceived need for a different social studies curriculum for rural versus urban social studies students. Four specific objectives were explored and the conclusions based upon the results follow:

Objective #1:

In general, this investigation revealed the respondents felt that social studies curriculum needs of rural students do not differ from those of urban students. On just one item the respondents did mildly agree that "The world of work in rural American is different enough from urban America that special information must be part of the social studies curriculum to compensate for this difference."

Objective #2:

The respondents indicated that they felt particular cultural aspects of rural and urban societies should be passed on to students by the formal educational process.

Objective #3:

The findings suggested that these rural social studies teachers incorporated rural-oriented aspects into their curriculum.

Objective #4:

In general, the beliefs of the instructors with rural backgrounds were similar to the instructors with urban backgrounds.

Statistically significant difference in beliefs related to the respondents' rural or urban background was noted in only one item. The item was, "It is more important for rural students than urban students to study the historical developments of the agriculturally based cultures." Instructors with a rural background more strongly disagreed with the item than did their urban-background colleagues.

Implications

Apparently rural and urban social studies students do not have unique curriculum needs according to the respondents in this study. Consequently, based upon this study, teacher training does not have to be differentiated in terms of curriculum for teachers preparing to teach either in rural or urban settings.

Respondents did indicate that, although a unique curriculum was not needed for rural students, a) the social studies curriculum should be supplemented so as to pass along cultural aspects of both rural and urban societies, and b) rural social studies teachers do incorporate rural-oriented material into their curriculum. The implication, then, is that textbook and curriculum material publishers should provide rurally oriented materials for use in rural schools.

Recommendations

Recommendations for future related studies are:

1. Replicate this study by conducting the questionnaire survey in larger schools in this same rurally-oriented geographic area.

2. Replicate this study by involving respondents in other rurally-oriented areas of the U.S. and/or in foreign countries.

3. Replicate the study by involving respondents in urban areas.

4. Respondents in other studies of this nature could be administrators, parents with students in school, parents with no students in school, and/or students.

5. Responses in other studies of this nature could be classified and analyzed according to several demographic characteristics such as age, educational attainment, years in teaching, race, sex, religion and/or political persuasion.

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Table 1

Overall Item Means and T-Tests

T-tests compare the rural and urban background instructor's responses.

OM = overall mean

T = T-value

df = pooled variance degrees of freedom

p = 2-tailed probability

Overall Mean Response Possibilities

1 = strongly disagree

2 = disagree

3 = mildly disagree

4 = mildly agree

5 = strongly agree

Item	Statistics
It is more important for rural students than urban students to study the historical developments of the agriculturally based cultures.	OM = 2.8 T = -2.78 df = 86 p = .007*
Life in modern societies is so complex and the need for knowledge and skills is so great that each unique society within our country must have a unique	OM = 2.8 T = -1.40 df = 86 p = .166

table continues

Item	Statistics
social studies curriculum to meet its own special needs.	
Students who live in rural areas should spend more time studying about such things as life, customs, advantages, and disadvantages of living in rural areas.	OM = 2.7 T = .26 df = 87 p = .794
Textbook publishers and authors need to create and distribute social studies texts which have been produced to meet the needs of unique socio-economic and geographic populations.	OM = 3.5 T = -.70 df = 86 p = .483
Special social studies reading materials designed to emphasize the rural culture is necessary because of the vocabulary which is peculiar to the rural environment.	OM = 3.2 T = 1.59 df = 87 p = .114
The relative importance of environmental knowledge for the rural population would indicate a need for a specially designed rural social studies curriculum.	OM = 3.0 T = -.17 df = 86 p = .866
The world of work in rural America is	OM = 3.6

table continues

Item	Statistics
different enough from urban America	T = -.26
that special information must be part	df = 87
of the social studies curriculum to	p = .796
compensate for this difference.	

* p < .05

Table 2

T-tests compare the rural and urban background instructor's responses.

OM = overall mean

T = T-value

df = pooled variance degrees of freedom

p = 2-tailed probability

Overall Mean Response Possibilities

1 = strongly agree	4 = mildly disagree
2 = agree	5 = disagree
3 = mildly agree	6 = strongly disagree

Item	Statistics
A student residing in a rural community	OM = 2.7
has very similar education needs to a	T = .35
student residing in an urban area.	df = 87
	p = .729
It is sufficient for our children to	OM = 3.1
learn the common components that	T = -.30
constitute the social and cultural	df = 85

table continues

legacy of this nation.	p = .765
Item	Statistics
All students should study the same social studies materials and topics regardless of whether they live in a city or in a rural area.	OM = 2.8 T = -1.13 df = 87 p = .262

Table 3

Item	Statistics
Teachers who plan to teach social studies in rural schools should be required to learn more about rural people.	OM = 3.4 T = 1.10 df = 87 p = .275
I often have my students read about life and customs of rural people.	OM = 3.6 T = 1.05 df = 86 p = 298
If social studies materials--books, films, filmstrips, pictures, pamphlets--emphasizing the characteristics of rural life were available I would recommend their use in my school system.	OM = 4.3 T = .82 df = 86 p = .416
Textbooks, films, pictures and media we	OM = 3.7

table continues

use in our social studies classes include as many items about rural areas as cities.	T = 1.01 df = 85 p = .318

Table 4

Item	Statistics
Most of the leaders we study about in our social studies classes grew up in and/or live in cities.	OM = 3.7 T = -1.92 df = 83 p = .058
My students do not readily identify with topics and materials which relate specifically to city or urban areas.	OM = 4.0 T = .26 df = 86 p = .798
The particular differences within the urban and rural cultures can be more efficiently taught to its children through the family than incorporated in the formal educational process.	OM = 4.1 T = 1.08 df = 87 p = .284
Rural and urban youth internalize their particular cultures's norms, values, expectations, and attitudes without having to be taught such materials in the social studies classroom.	OM = 3.8 T = 1.70 df = 87 p = .092